

A HISTORY OF ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH OF WILLIAMS TOWNSHIP

Among the candidates at the annual meeting of the Ministerium of Pennsylvania held June 2-6, 1844 was a young man named G.A. Wenzel (sic). A year earlier at this same meeting of the Ministerium, held June 11-15, 1843, this young man from Philadelphia had asked to be examined for admission into the ministerium, and had been admitted to examination. It was during that meeting, on June 12, 1843, that Wentzel had written a letter to the president of the Ministerium, the Rev. C. Miller, requesting permission to "visit and immediately to accept charge of vacant congregations. His request was granted." Now after serving for a year as a candidate to the ministry, this hopeful young minister had returned to the annual meeting to meet with the Examining Committee. He, and two others, C. Erle, and C. Neumann, were examined "in the different branches of theology" and were found to be making satisfactory progress, thus it was resolved that licenses for these 3 men be renewed for one year. And a year later, at the 98th Annual Convention of the German Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium, on Wednesday evening, May 21, 1845, G.A. Wenzel (sic) became an ordained minister.(7)

This date was to prove significant, however, not only to young Pastor Wentzel, but also to a small congregation of Reformed and Lutheran Christians forming during those days on Morgan Hill in Williams Township south of Easton. For exactly 3 years later, on May 21st, 1848, the cornerstone was laid for St. John's Church (New Williams), and Rev. G.A. Wentzel was to be its first pastor.(8)

Lutherans had been in Williams Township for many years prior to the days of St. John's Church. Names like Raub, Illick, and Unangst, which would figure prominently in the early days of St. John's had been in the township for generations.(9) "According to the record of the [St. Luke's Old] Williams Church, the Illick family is the only one that [had] representatives in the church from its early beginning at Morgan Hill and [St. Luke's] (1756) to the present."(9) And there were Raupps (sic) in the township even before the "evangelistic work of John Caspar Stover", who was the founder of the original Morgan Hill Church and its pastor from 1728 to 1737. Indeed, Lutherans at the forks of the Delaware and the Lehigh had first met in "the Morgan Hill Church (located at Cedarville, now South Easton)" and they had developed into a rather large congregation. "But through lack of regular pastoral care and internal dissensions it declined rapidly...and by 1755, it seems to have been almost entirely abandoned. This was followed in 1756, by re-location of the "Church of the Augsburg Confession" to the present site of Old Williams which thereupon became known as the "Williamstown-Saucon" Church.

In place of the one congregation at Morgan Hill there [became] at least three: The one in New Jersey (St. James, "Straw Church", originating in 1755), the Williamstown-Saucon Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Congregation in Easton. These three congregations had their origin in the Morgan Hill Church and each one may regard her as their deceased mother." (6)

In the early 1840's, however, the Lutherans around Morgan Hill began to talk seriously about forming another congregation in Williams Township. "The rigors of traveling five or six miles over rough, narrow roads to Easton or to Old Williams" was taking its toll and people wanted a church of their own closer to home. (10) The distances were "especially lamented by the older people on funeral occasions." (11) And so, in 1844, a new Lutheran congregation was formed on Morgan Hill. (6) Where it first met or who its first members were is not known.

Along with the Lutherans, a group of Reformed believers on Morgan Hill were also forming a congregation, and so "in January 1848 [the two fledgling congregations] resolved to go forward at once with building a new church." (11) "It was to be a Union Church to be occupied by both the German Evangelical Lutheran and the German Reformed congregations." (11)

"At the same time, Jacob Knecht, representing the Reformed, and Philip Unangst, representing the Lutherans, were unanimously elected as trustees. They were instructed to obtain a piece of ground for building a church and for burying the dead. David Zeller and John Unangst were appointed to the building committee, and George Bruch Sr. was elected treasurer..." (11)

"The first tract of land, 100 perches [about 1 acre], was given by Mr. [George] Bruch, [Sr.], the deed specifying "for interring the dead". At about the same time it seems to have been apparent that if the church were built on this tract, very little ground would be left for cemetery purposes. Therefore steps were taken to acquire another tract adjoining the original tract. This additional tract or lot [acquired from John Unangst] measured 330 feet in depth by 66 feet frontage along the Old Philadelphia Road and contained 80 perches. Deeds for both of these tracts were dated and recorded on December 20, 1847." (10) The purchase price for these approximately two acres of ground, was one dollar per acre. On May 21, 1848 the cornerstone was laid, building began, and by November of that year, the church was completed. The congregations assembled on the church ground and put the following resolutions into the [corner]stone:

1. That the one congregation shall have the use of the church on one Sunday and the other the next Sunday for their exclusive use.

2. That neither the one or the other of the two congregations shall have an advantage over the other in title or right, nor attempt to assume it, nor be able to disturb the other in her religious worship in any manner whatever, as long as the worship is conducted according to the custom of our fathers, and as both confessions require.

3. That no one shall be allowed to preach in this church or be elected pastor, who is not ordained and an actual member of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Pennsylvania, or some other Synod of the Lutheran Church in the United States, or a member of the German Reformed Synod of the United States.

4. That English service shall be held in this church as soon as, and as often as the majority of either congregation shall think it necessary.

5. That the new church shall be named, "The St. John's Church of Upper Williams Township, Northampton County, Pa." (1)

That first church stood "approximately 50 feet north of the present [Lutheran] church building" and was built of stone, had one large room, a high pulpit on its eastern end and a gallery. "(1)" The entire cost of the church was \$1,750, some members donating their services. "(1)"

"A few years later [in] 1853 another tract of land, triangular in shape and lying to the front of the church, bordered on the north and east sides by public roads was purchased. The tract, known as the church grove, gave the new church added scenic beauty. It contained one acre and 72 perches and was deeded to the congregations by John I. Unangst and recorded at Easton in January 1854. (sic) Philip B. Unangst, Lutheran trustee, and William Fassbinner, Reformed trustee, signed for deed." (10)

"[Twenty] years later, in 1875, the matter of accommodating the pastor's horse and carriage arose. The new owner of the Bruch farm, Owen Walter, then deeded to the Lutheran congregation for \$3.00 a small lot on which to build a church shed." (10)

"The question of adding more ground to the cemetery became imperative and by 1877, Joseph Kiefer had become owner of the John I. Unangst farm. From him one acre of land was purchased for \$25.00 [sic/\$250.00] which brought the southern boundary of the cemetery to within 25 feet of the foundation wall of the present church." (10)

A great deal is not known about the days of the Union

church but according to A Bicentennial History of Williams Township "the early congregation lacked wealth... the church collections from 22 April 1855 to March 1856 totaled \$17.77. [And] on 8 July 1849 a purchase of three hymnals was made at a cost of \$1.87." (10)

But the union was not to last. Problems between the two congregations began to be in evidence during the pastorate of Rev. J.Q. Upp (1877-1885), and even though he "used his best influence to quiet [the] unrest" (10) in 1882 "the Reformed congregation decided to separate from the Lutherans and bought one acre of ground from John S. Unangst for \$125.00." The new Reformed church was subsequently built and then dedicated on November 5, 1882. (1)

When the union was dissolved in 1882, the Lutherans "conceived the necessity of building their own church." "Mr. [Joseph] Kiefer, an influential member, readily consented to give a tract containing (Thirty and Thirty-four One Hundred twenty-first perches) on which the [present] church stands." (10) "The plans were copied from the Aineyville Lutheran Church in South Allentown [where a Rev. Chas. E. Sandt presided as pastor]. Bricks were purchased near Allentown and shipped to the chain dam, and from there farm teams drove them to the building site. A contract for the building was given to the Kern Contracting Company of Allentown. The total cost was to be \$8,000. Dedicatory services were held on January 16, 1887." (1)

Church records during those first years of St. John's Lutheran Church indicate that the membership was at 265, with 123 communing in 1885. Communion was offered twice a year, usually in April or May, and again in October or November. The first pastor of the Lutheran congregation was [the pastor of the Aineyville Lutheran Church] Rev. C.E. Sandt, serving from 1885 to 1899. (9)(6)

As has always been the case, Sunday School was a priority for the members of St. John's and so on March 9, 1884, the St. John's Lutheran Sunday School was established. Its superintendents were Charles W. Laudenberger and Jacob J. Klinehaus. The secretary was Edwin Jacoby, treasurer, Jacob Schultz, librarians Thomas Wollen, Richard Pifer, and Miss Mary Brotzman, with Miss Brotzman also serving as the Sunday School organist. (8)

The earliest available financial records from 1892 indicate that the total offerings for that year were \$234.85, with Philip Unangst, being the biggest giver, having contributed \$7.00. (4) Interestingly, in 1896, the total collections were \$340.82 and expenses were \$343.82, and so it is noted that D.S. Unangst Jr. contributed \$3.00 to balance the books. Since a large yearly contribution was apparently anything over \$5.00, this gift appears to have been significant. The Treasurer in that year was J.J.

Ealer. (12)

The official parish register from those early days also shows that the last confirmation class confirmed in the old stone church was on November 20, 1886 by Rev. Sandt and the class consisted of the following students:

Charles Unangst	Howard Kiefer	Harvey Unangst
George Long	Freeman Kiefer	Henry Helm
Reuban Crick	George Small	Dora Raub
Sarah Raub	Emma Helm	Cora Coken
Katie Siefert	Laura Pfenning	Carrie Hineline

It can be noted that the prominent names of Unangst, Kiefer, and Raub continue to be present as well as new names like Helm and Hineline, which would become prominent in years to come.

Also according to the parish register, the last funeral conducted in the old stone church was by Rev. Sandt for Mrs. Harry (Sevilla) Moser, a 24 year-old woman, on November 19, 1885, and the first funeral conducted in the new church was for Mr. Nicholas Kline, on February 12, 1887. (4)

In 1900 the "last tract of land containing two acres and 24 perches was purchased from Joseph Kiefer and added to the cemetery. Rev. G.D. Drukenmiller (1900-1901) was pastor. [In that year also] the Lutheran Quarterly adopted in the Sunday School." (3)

The history of pastors at St. John's Union Church is somewhat uncertain. Though we know that the Reformed and the Lutheran congregations used the building on alternate Sundays for their own worship, it is not known if each congregation had its own pastor, or whether one pastor served both congregations. According to the Reformed congregational history, only 2 pastors served during the Union days: Rev. William Gerhard (1849-1855) and Rev. D.F. Brendel (1855-1887).⁽²⁾ But according to the History of the Allentown Conference the pastors at St. John's were "probably, Rev. G.A. Wentzel (1846-1851)", Reverends J.C. Schmidt and Rev. N. Yeager in some combination from 1856 to 1860, Rev. Philip Pfatteicher serving both New and Old Williams in 1861 and 1862, Rev. John J. Cressman (1867-1877), and Rev. J. Q. Upp during the time of the dissolution of the union (1877-1885), and finally Rev. C.E. Sandt as the first pastor of the Lutheran congregation, serving 1885-1899. (4)

"Church services were held in the Union Church every two weeks in the forenoon. During the pastorate of Rev. Sandt, who served 3 scattered congregations, there was no regularly fixed hour. There were also German services as well as English. After 1900 German services were few and

far between, several being given only because they were requested. The regular time for the church service also was changed to the afternoon." (10)

From the establishment of the Lutheran congregation to the present the pastorates have, with noteworthy exceptions, been short and vacancies have been common. Chronologically they are as follows:

1885-1899	Rev. Charles E. Sandt
1900-1901	Rev. G.D. Druckenmiller
1902	vacant
1902-1903	Rev. E.H. Eberts
1904	Supplies (Rev. H.A. Kunkle supplying several months)
1905-1909	Rev. S.M. Wenrich
1910-1914	Rev. J.S. Renninger
1915-1919	Rev. L.S. Trump
1920	vacant
1921-1923	Rev. O.S. Scheirer
1923-1924	Rev. W.A. Lambert, who after a brief pastorate suffered a breakdown
1925-1927	Rev. A.R. Apple, stated supply (6)
1927-1929	Rev. W.P. Reumann, stated supply
1929-1935	Rev. F.K. Fretz, stated supply; his students ministering here were, the Rev. Warren O. Heinley & Rev. Paul W. Dieckman
1935	Supplies; pulpit occupied by retired pastors faculty preachers, & students
1936-1939	Rev. Harold Muffley
1939-1957	Rev. Lawrence G. Deily
1957-1961	Rev. Samuel S. Kistler
1961-1964	Rev. William B. Freyer, Jr.
1964-1967	Rev. Michael Levengood
1967-1970	Rev. Robert Kistler
1970-1972	Supplies
1972-1984	Rev. Malcolm W. Albright
1985-1991	Rev. Michael A. Frost (11)
1991-	Rev. Glenn L. Monson

As can be seen from this list of pastorates, the notable exceptions to short pastorates were Rev. Lawrence Deily who served for 18 years until his death, and Rev. Malcolm Albright who served for 12 years until his retirement. During the tenure of Pastor Deily "the church went through a great many changes including changes in the physical layout of the church worship area. Extensive renovations to the chancel were begun in 1956. Moving away from the Reformed style of a central pulpit with a small communion table in front, the church became traditionally Lutheran with a central altar and a new pulpit and lectern on either side. A new baptismal font and communion rail were also installed at this time. The new chancel was dedicated to the memory of Pastor Deily whose death came before the work was

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. _____. A Bicentennial History of Williams Township. 1976. pp.46-48.
2. _____. 1986 Directory of St. John's United Church of Christ, 2720 Morgan Hill Road, Easton, PA.
3. _____. Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration of St. John's Lutheran Church (New Williams). Sept.2-6, 1936.
4. _____. Financial Secretary's Records of St. John's Lutheran Church, 1892.
5. Laury, Rev. Preston A. Fountain of Streams, A History of Williams Township, Northampton County, Pennsylvania, and the Old Williams Church.
6. Laury, Preston A. The History of the Allentown Conference of the Ministerium of Pennsylvania. Kutztown, Pennsylvania: Kutztown Publishing Company, Inc., 1926. pp. 226-227.
7. _____. Ministerium of Pennsylvania Minutes. (92-107). 1840-1854.
8. _____. Minutes from March 9, 1884 meeting of St. John's Lutheran Sunday School.
9. _____. Parish Register (Vol.1) of St. John's Lutheran Church. Pastor, Rev. Charles E. Sandt. 1885f.
10. _____. "Rigors of Travel Brought Founding of New Church in Williams Township". Easton Express, Sept.2, 1936.
11. _____. St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church of Williams Township 1886-1986. A History of St. John's New Williams on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the church building.
12. _____. Treasurer's Book of St. John's Lutheran Church. J.J. Easler, treasurer. 1896.